

Senate News Brief

from Senate Republicans

"At a time when compassion is called for, some protesters offer only hatred and vitriol. It's all the worse because a grieving family is trying to mourn the loss of someone who dedicated his or her life to protecting the rights of all citizens. This bill was carefully written to be limited in scope. It is founded on the principle that a funeral is certainly a place where citizens have a legitimate expectation of privacy."

– **Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny)**, sponsor of legislation approved Tuesday by the Senate to limit the scope of protests at funerals and memorial services.

Preview

PUBLIC HEARINGS SET ON REDUCING MERCURY EMISSIONS

THE SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**, will hold the first of two public hearings on how to best craft a state program to reduce mercury emissions. The hearings are scheduled for April 25th and May 2nd in the state Capitol. State and federal officials, as well as environmental, sportsmen, electric generation, coal, and business organizations are slated to testify. *(See below for more.)*

SEN. ERICKSON TO CHAIR WATERSHED MANAGEMENT HEARING

THE SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE, chaired by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)**, will chair a public hearing today, on watershed planning and management.

The purpose of the hearing, to be held in Upper Darby Township, Delaware County, will be to solicit testimony on the issue of watershed planning and management by local governments. The committee will focus on the manner in which development in upstream municipalities affects municipalities in downstream areas, and will also discuss proposals to alleviate flooding problems in downstream municipalities.

Review

SENATE ACTS TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF GRIEVING MILITARY FAMILIES

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE PROTESTS AND HARASSMENT AT MILITARY FUNERALS IN PENNSYLVANIA, the Senate approved legislation Tuesday to limit the scope of such activity and protect the rights of grieving military families.

Senate Bill 1150, sponsored by **Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny)** and **Sen. Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland)**, would require protesters to remain 500 feet from any funeral, memorial service or memorial procession beginning one hour before and ending one hour after the event. Violators would be charged with a third-degree misdemeanor.

The pickets, which have turned up across Pennsylvania and the nation, target grieving military family members with vulgar language and other harassment to protest social and political issues. Senate Bill 1150 is supported by a bipartisan group of lawmakers from both chambers of the General Assembly.

Wisconsin, Indiana and South Dakota have recently enacted laws limiting protests at funerals, and at least 12 other states are considering similar legislation. The legislation is supported by the American Legion, the Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police and the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and other organizations. Senate Bill 1150 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

SEN. MARY JO WHITE INTRODUCES BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO REDUCE MERCURY EMISSIONS

BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION THAT WOULD LEAD TO REDUCED MERCURY EMISSIONS from coal-fired power plants was introduced Tuesday by **Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee Chair Mary Jo White (R-Venango)**.

Under Senate Bill 1201, Pennsylvania's coal-fired power plants will be required to reduce mercury emissions by 86 percent no later than 2018. In March 2005, the United States became the first nation in the world to regulate mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. States have until November 2006 to indicate to the federal government how they intend to implement the mercury emission reduction rule.

For more on the issue, please see *In the Spotlight and Fast Facts*, below.

SENATE VOTES TO UPDATE, STRENGTHEN LAW COVERING BANK ROBBERIES

THE SENATE on Tuesday approved legislation to update and strengthen the state law covering bank robbery crimes.

Since 2001, Pennsylvania has experienced a steady, annual increase in the number of bank robberies. At the same time, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has increasingly delegated the primary investigatory and prosecutorial responsibilities of such crimes to states.

Senate Bill 957, sponsored by **Sen. Mike Waugh (R-York)**, clarifies that a defendant who does not use a weapon during a bank robbery commits a serious crime -- a second-degree felony -- if it is done by making a demand orally or in writing. This is important, as nearly 70 percent of bank robberies in 2004 were committed by using a note. The bill was sent to the House of Representatives.

SENATE APPROVES ROADSIDE SAFETY MEASURE FOR EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

THE SENATE approved legislation Tuesday aimed at improving police officer safety on vehicle stops and at other times when officers perform official duties along highways.

Senate Bill 703, sponsored by **Sen. Ted Erickson (R-Delaware)**, would require motorists to slow down and, when possible, move to another lane when approaching police and other emergency vehicles stopped along roadways.

The measure includes a provision directing the state Department of Transportation to provide educational awareness to the public and to post signs along highways informing motorists of the new law. Senate Bill 703 was sent to the House of Representatives.

In the Spotlight

MERCURY IS A GLOBALLY-EMITTED POLLUTANT, with approximately half of all emissions coming from natural sources, such as volcanoes and geysers. Mercury emissions from Pennsylvania power plants account for .09% of global emissions. While a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that women and young children do not have blood mercury levels which would cause adverse health effects, the study recognizes that state legislation is necessary to reduce mercury emissions.

According to information from the state Department of Environmental Protection, further mercury emission reductions will come as a benefit of plants installing control technologies under a separate federal rulemaking known as CAIR, or the Clean Air Interstate Rule. CAIR requires power plants to further reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x). Current DEP estimates project that 90 percent of the generating capacity in Pennsylvania will have CAIR control technologies by 2015.

Fast Facts

SENATE BILL 1201 – REDUCING MERCURY EMISSIONS IN PENNSYLVANIA

- Requires mercury emission reductions of 86 percent over 1999 emission rates, and 94 percent as measured from the coal content.
- Maximizes the benefits to be achieved under the federal government's Clean Air Interstate Rule (CAIR).
- Utilizes an emission allowance cap and trade program, providing incentives for power plants to comply earlier and achieve greater emission reductions.
- Is supported by a broad coalition of business, coal and labor associations.

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